DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 422 757 HE 031 352

AUTHOR	Hunt, James B., Jr.
TITLE	Organizing for Learning: The View from the Governor's Office.
INSTITUTION	National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, CA.
PUB DATE	1998-03-00
NOTE	17p.; Address presented at the National Conference of the American Association for Higher Education (Atlanta, GA, March 20-22, 1998).
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Access to Education; *Educational Improvement; Educational Objectives; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; Government Role; Higher Education; Low Income Groups; *Public Policy; *Role of Education; State Aid
IDENTIFIERS	Affordability; G I Bill; North Carolina

ABSTRACT

This speech discusses the importance of higher education, the challenges facing higher education in America today, and the role of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education in helping to make higher education more accessible and affordable. It further discusses initiatives in North Carolina to improve elementary, secondary, and higher education, and calls for states to expand their commitment to higher education. The speech goes on the examine the purposes of higher education, including promoting good citizenship, making people better human beings, and providing them with world-competitive skills. It looks at the role of public policy in higher education over the last several decades, noting the great achievements of the GI Bill in opening the doors of higher education to an entire generation after the World War II. The speech then focuses on two deficits in higher education today an opportunity deficit and a learning deficit. The former involves the limited opportunities that children from low-income families have for attending higher education, while the latter refers to the increasing numbers of students who attend college but do not graduate. (MDM)

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ORGANIZING FOR LEARNING:

THE VIEW FROM THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

BY JAMES B. HUNT JR.

Governor of North Carolina and
Chair of The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR
PUBLIC POLICY AND
HIGHER EDUCATION

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Organizing for Learning:
The View from the Governor's Office

An Address by James B. Hunt Jr.

Governor of North Carolina and
Chair of The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

June 1998

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

This address was delivered to the Annual Conference of the American Association for Higher Education in Atlanta, Georgia, on March 22, 1998.

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I am delighted to be here today and I appreciate having this opportunity to talk with you. I have admired the American Association for Higher Education for a long time, and I applaud your accomplishments in helping students learn more effectively. All Americans need to value the work that you do.

I have come here today in two capacities: as governor of the State of North Carolina and as chair of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. As the title of my remarks has promised, I will share with you some of my views from the governor's office regarding education. Then I will take the bulk of my time to talk about the work of the new National Center. As I hope to make clear to you today, I believe that higher education in America has a marvelous track record. Since World War II, it has provided each generation of Americans with greater opportunities for learning and growth. It has created knowledge and pushed forward the boundaries of progress. And it has helped to transform this country into a great political and economic power.

But I also believe that today, America faces a series of challenges that threaten to close the doors of opportunity to higher education. I describe those challenges as two kinds of deficits that face this great nation: an opportunity deficit and a learning deficit. I'll explain what I mean by those terms later, but I want you to know from the start that I'm here today because I want America to respond to the challenges it faces. I want it to respond by expanding its commitment to higher education. By keeping the doors of opportunity open to everyone, to *all* Americans. And by keeping college affordable. Is that too high a wall to climb? Not a chance. But you'll have to bear with me as I explain.

Views from the Governor's Office: The Importance of Education

Beginning in the mid-1970s, I served for two terms as governor of North Carolina. I remained out of office for eight years and was elected again as governor in 1992. As you know, I have always been interested in education. I have worked hard—both in office and out of office—to support and improve education.

In my state we have an initiative called Smart Start. We know increasingly

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from research on the brain that the brain develops the most in the earliest years. We know that when a child is stimulated and nurtured and cared for, their brain responds by literally connecting up. And we know that it's critically important to provide that stimulation and nurturing in the child's first years. We are pushing this very hard in North Carolina, with support from our educational community, especially from higher education, at a place called the Frank Porter Graham Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. We know that we cannot guarantee that every child will soar, but we can put them all on the launching pad. I encourage all of you as higher education leaders to support early childhood development in your states. In North Carolina this effort involves quality education, including from parents—the first and most important teachers. And it involves good health care for all children in their first five years. Here in Georgia you've begun a kindergarten for four-year-olds, and that is a great accomplishment. But I could argue that the three years before that are just as important.

My view as governor is also that we need to commit to K–12 education. I'm concerned about our public schools and I want to help them be truly excellent. In North Carolina, we have pushed to raise student standards. We have also raised teacher standards so that our teachers know their subject matter, know how to teach well, and know how to work with their colleagues, parents and communities. And in becoming very successful, they have become more involved in the reform of their schools.

In North Carolina we have also set high goals for raising the salaries for our public school teachers and administrators. I'll share a secret with you that I think is important: too often we do not give the people the credit they deserve. In 1996 I ran for governor saying, "If I am elected, we will raise the standards for teachers and we will raise salaries from a present position of 43rd in the nation to the national average. We will do it in four years." Some people told me, "That's going to sound like too much money." Well, it amounted to one billion dollars. Others told me, "The people won't respond to that." But you know what we found? People were willing to accept a challenge if it meant better schools. People have high goals for their schools, and they wanted us to have high goals. They responded in a powerful way, just as they did here in Georgia in establishing kindergartens for four-year-olds, paying tuition for students who make As and Bs, and providing technology for education at all levels. If we go about it right, we can trust the people to make the right decisions and to give the right kind of support.

Yet another perspective from the governor's office—and I am now

becoming more involved in this—is that we must expand substantially our commitment to higher education. Many of you know that North Carolina cast its lot with higher education over two centuries ago. We are very proud that we established the first public university in America, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, at that time. More than four decades ago we built a community college system that is open to people in every county in the state; everyone in North Carolina lives within 30 minutes of a campus. Our state has built a higher education system not just with great basketball teams, but with strong public and private colleges and universities. People in North Carolina feel an ownership for their colleges and universities. They cherish them. Their colleges and universities have helped work a miracle in North Carolina. This is literally true. I remember that when Georgia Governor Zell Miller and I started in politics, Georgia and North Carolina—and the South generally—were poor places. But in our state, in Georgia, and throughout the South we've seen a transformation. Our state has transformed itself into a thriving and prosperous center for research and technology. "Tobacco Road" is now the "Research Triangle." I cannot tell you what a difference it has made.

Every week the governor's pages come in, we have a picture taken in the Capitol, and I have a chance to talk to them. Every week I ask them, "If you were governor, what would you do?" You can probably guess what their answers are. Almost every week it's education. They would improve their schools. They are interested in their opportunities for higher education. That's what young people care the most about, and that's what their parents care the most about.

But I also believe that today, America faces a series of challenges that threaten to close the doors of opportunity to higher education.

And you know what else they tell me? I served as chair of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and as chair of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. I worked with some of you in these areas. Because of my interest in how we go about teaching, I would often ask the governor's pages about their teachers. And almost every week their responses were about the same. At least half or more said that their teachers were very good. About half said that they were pretty good. Only a few hands went up to say that they were not so good. I tell you about those responses so you know you've done a pretty good job—maybe a very good job—of preparing your teachers, although we've got a long way to go and we know we can do better.

The Purposes of Higher Education

I've told you some of my views on education so that you know how I approach the second position that I speak from today—as chair of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. The Center's purpose is the same cause that we have championed in North Carolina in our higher education efforts, in our efforts to achieve excellent public schools, and in our efforts to give our children a Smart Start—in other words, to emphasize learning all the way through. That cause—and it's one that all of you have devoted your lives to—involves opening the doors of opportunity, the doors that lead to success and achievement and fulfillment in our country. The doors that have led Americans to better lives.

Education generally, and higher education in particular, has several purposes—and one of the most important is to promote citizenship. As I look at the political scene today, having good citizens who care, who understand, who can ferret out truth seems to me to be more and more important. And we ought to say it first when we talk about our purposes.

For the first time in history, the children of average people—the sons and daughters of farmers and mechanics—could get a college degree.

A second purpose is preparing people to be good human beings, to be good members of families, to be the kind of parents and spouses we ought to be in our families and communities.

And of course a third purpose involves educating people with world-competitive skills. One of the reasons I have always been very interested in education—I will be frank about this, and many of your governors would say the same thing—is because I want to help people have good jobs. Not just jobs, but good jobs that pay people well, that enable them to provide for their families. Most governors work hard to create jobs and would describe themselves as "economic development governors." The best strategy for doing that, I've come to realize, is to stress education—to educate and train and motivate people so that they are bright and productive, so that they can think for a living. And you try to do that for *all* of the people.

The Role of Public Policy in Higher Education

Higher education in this country has a good track record. I am the dean of the governors in terms of my tenure in office—or I will be at the end of this year when Terry Branstead of Iowa completes his term. When I look back over the last several decades in my state and across this nation, it is clear what has happened in the main to change this country. One of the great engines that

literally transformed America after World War II was the GI Bill. For the first time in history, the children of average people—the sons and daughters of farmers and mechanics—could get a college degree. Of course, the veterans received other kinds of education, such as skills training. I can remember the vets working at night at a vocational education center in my community. The lights were on in the shops. They were learning skills. But the point is, every American after the GI Bill could begin to aspire to attend college, and they did by the tens of thousands. Not only did they get college educations, but others in their families began to say, "That can be for us." And I can remember when a lot of the graduates who stepped up on stage to receive their diplomas were the first ones in their families to do so. It began with the GI Bill and with the idea that all of the people who had served this country, people so valuable to us as a society, should have a chance to attend college.

Ever since the veterans went to college, our society has provided each generation with successively greater opportunities to get a higher education.

The GI Bill provided hundreds of thousands of people with unprecedented opportunity to learn. It created the educated population that propelled our nation into world leadership. It made possible the great American middle class. It gave people who had been left out a chance to strive, to climb the ladder, and to aspire to be the best. It contributed to the tenacious growth of democratic values and institutions that eventually won the Cold War and put this nation in the position it is in today, clearly the leading nation in the world—but one whose potential is still unfulfilled.

Think for a moment about what we've accomplished during the past few decades, about the opportunity and prosperity we have created in this country—even though we need to create more opportunity, especially in certain places. Ever since the veterans went to college, our society has provided each generation with successively greater opportunities to get a higher education. I suggest that nothing has meant more to America becoming today's great economic powerhouse. As in no other nation, the young people in America have been able to develop their talents and their intellect through public and private two-year and four-year institutions of higher learning. No politician or party or political ideology deserves credit for this transformation. It was the American people who wanted it done, and in large measure it was higher education that did it and has helped us progress in the years since.

The doors of opportunity in America open directly into the classrooms, labs, and libraries, directly into the colleges and universities where you work, teach and are administrators—where you're guiding people all the time. We must open those doors much wider, I suggest to you, if our nation is to be what it can and must be for our children and grandchildren.

The Challenges Facing Higher Education in America

I wanted to talk about the past successes of public policy regarding higher education, particularly as I take on this new role as chair of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, because I think we can successfully respond to the challenges we now face. In my opinion, some of these challenges involve a closing of the doors of opportunity in America—trends that will limit how far we go and what we become. I believe that this threat to opportunity does exist today. In relation to higher education I describe this threat in terms of two kinds of deficits. I choose that term because I think it might help us focus on our problems and our possibilities.

The benefits of our great system of colleges and universities are still uneven and, I believe, unfairly distributed—and this is what I mean by an opportunity deficit.

The word "deficit," of course, is a word that has been fraught with meaning for years in America. We worried through the 1980s and the 1990s—until very recently—about huge budget deficits and huge trade deficits. In fact, we worried so much that we did something about it. I remember going to a National Governors Association conference in Washington, D.C., back in the early 80s, when the deficit was $250 billion a year. And it was increasing yearly. The point is that we became concerned about the budget deficit. We recognized it for the threat that it was. And we *have* done something about it, though there is more to be done yet.

I believe that today in America we face a deficit of opportunity and a deficit of learning in higher education. Let me explain what I mean by those terms.

A Deficit of Opportunity

The benefits of our great system of colleges and universities are still uneven and, I believe, unfairly distributed—and this is what I mean by an opportunity deficit. I've spoken today about how much things have improved in our county. But the truth is that not all who could benefit from higher education have had the opportunity to learn. One of the most powerful ways to think about this opportunity deficit is to consider the following:

- A person from a family with an income above $75,000 per year has an 86% chance of reaching college by age 18 to 24.
- A person whose family income is less than $10,000 per year has a 38% chance of reaching college by the same age.

I want us to stay focused on those people who do not have an equal chance.

I don't know how everyone else stays in touch with what's happening in the real world, but I have two ways. One, I go home to my farm every

weekend and I farm, I raise cattle, I put out big bales of hay, which I did at 6:00 a.m. yesterday morning. I go to the local country store and I listen to people. Second, every week I leave the governor's office and go to a nearby school, a predominantly African-American middle school that is located next to a public housing community. I work with a young man in the sixth grade. I am his mentor. And I have done that for years and years. It is a way for me to stay in touch. People in education, in higher education, need to have ways to do that—all of us do.

Today our nation stands on the verge of the largest cohort of young Americans to come of college age since the Baby Boomers. Those of us who are dealing with public education are seeing the numbers increase every year. More students are making their way through elementary and secondary schools right now. In the next decade, almost half the states—including my own—will experience increases of 25 percent or more in the numbers of high school graduates. In fact, I heard the president of our university system speak to a business group last week and project that our state will have the fourth largest increase in public school enrollments of any state in America. The nation, the states and the colleges, I am afraid, are behind the curve in planning to meet the educational needs of this tidal wave that is coming at us. It is something that you and I need to be thinking about and planning for.

The cost and price of higher education are also matters of great importance. They are legitimate and real concerns for many working class and middle class American families, especially for those that are most disadvantaged economically. Cost bears a direct relation to opportunity.

Frankly, in some quarters colleges and universities are being criticized as sluggish in their responses to the changing needs of students and the changing economic and demographic conditions of American society. While this is not true in every situation, it is something we ought to be very aware of, because we ought to be looking ahead, we ought to be anticipating. American higher education ought to be getting ready. And everything we know about the 21st century tells us, as you well know, that higher education will be even more central to the future of our states and our nation than it has ever been before.

Far too many students from all backgrounds leave higher education with their personal aspirations unrealized and with society's needs for them to learn and contribute unmet.

A Deficit of Learning

The opportunity deficit refers primarily to who gets into our colleges and universities. That is, how can we ensure that opportunities to attend college are better distributed? But there is also a deficit of learning in America—and

by that I mean what happens to students once they get to college. In general, we have done far better—and I think you know this—far better at developing the talents of students who come to us from middle class and from privileged backgrounds than we have with those from less advantaged circumstances. But far too many students from all backgrounds leave higher education with their personal aspirations unrealized and with society's needs for them to learn and contribute unmet.

Let me make the point this way. In recent decades we have steadily increased the percentage of high school graduates going on to college. But since the mid-1970s, the proportion of 25- to 29-year-olds *completing* four years of college has not increased much; in fact it has *stalled* in the 23 to 25 percent range. Let me say it another way. Of the students who entered college in 1989 aspiring to four-year degrees, 46 percent had received a bachelor's degree five years later. That's less than half. Five percent had received an associate degree five years later, 3 percent had received a certificate, and 18 percent were still enrolled. And 28 percent—almost one third—had not earned a degree and were no longer enrolled. Almost a third.

We have formed the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education to increase opportunity in America.

The Educational Testing Service recently said it this way: "Higher education digs deeply into the pool of high school graduates with a sieve."

I have spent most of my life working with K–12 education. In K–12, we use the term "drop-outs" for those who leave school early. In higher education these people tend to be called "retention problems." I'd like for us to think hard about this idea of a learning deficit. And I'd like to work on finding solutions to it—not by reducing our commitment to quality, but by increasing it, and finding ways to keep those students enrolled, studying, learning, and moving ahead. We can do better than we're doing. The National Center and I want to work with you to do it.

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

We have formed the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education to increase opportunity in America. That is why I am here talking with you today. The Center is supported by a consortium of national foundations. Its core value is that higher education is a priceless national resource. Its core operating principle is to look at higher education in terms of the broad public interest of this nation, of our states, of our people. And its core mission is to inspire a large and inclusive conversation about how higher education can address that public interest, a conversation that includes you, all of our higher

education community, our governors and legislators, and our civic, business and local political leaders—because the future of colleges and universities is everybody's business.

The Center begins its work by asking five sets of questions that I suspect you have asked. If you haven't I hope you will.

1. How can we assure opportunities for education and training beyond high school for the next generation of Americans? We need to think about that. We need to worry about it.
2. How can we improve education's success as well as access? That is, how can we assure that students are effective learners once they come to our colleges? They've done all the work so they're eligible to attend. How do we help ensure their success?
3. How can we assure that higher education is a countervailing force to—and not a support structure for—what many now see as an increasing bipolar distribution of wealth, income and opportunity in America?
4. How can we do all this while keeping higher education affordable for America's families and for its taxpayers?
5. How can we assure high school students that their and their families' hard work will be rewarded by college opportunity? How do we give that assurance to all the people in this country? How do we make real the commitment that supporting, offering and mastering a rigorous curriculum will lead to college opportunity regardless of a family's financial resources? How can we assure that our teaching programs fully prepare teachers to help students master that curriculum?

The theme underlying all of these questions is, of course, opportunity. The doors to higher education are not swinging open as much as they should, and we are not graduating as many students as we should. Let me give you an analogy. We are opening the doors in early childhood education. We have them wide open in K–12 public schools, though our challenge there is to make the quality of education better. But how do we swing the doors open in higher education? We ought to have a passion to do that.

Getting a College Education Is More Important than Ever

Let me share some findings very quickly from a survey that the Public Agenda agency did for the Center. The survey, which was released last week, found that more than half of Americans believe that getting a college education in the next decade will be more difficult than it is today. It ought to be the other way

around; it ought to be getting easier. And people ought to sense that we're moving toward that.

The survey also showed that people know how important higher education is. In overwhelming numbers, Americans believe that high school graduates should go on to college even if they have a good job offer when they graduate. That finding is important. It ought to make you as educators proud, for it means that people value the education you provide.

The survey also showed that Americans believe:

- that their states need more college graduates in order to be successful economically;
- that no student who is qualified and motivated to attend college should be prevented from enrolling because of price;
- that policies that limit the number of people who have access to college are unacceptable;
- that we ought to have approaches that help more people enroll and do well;
- that in 1998, right now, students and families are doing about all they can to pay for college; and
- that additional price increases at this time are a bad idea.

One of the public policy issues that we should address—and I know this is sensitive with all families who want to see their young people and their adults reach their potentials—is how much should tuition be increased? How much financial debt should students and their families be expected to take on? Even with the new initiatives to help them borrow earlier and over a longer period of time, how much is too much for individuals to pay for colleges and universities?

Conclusion: Higher Education Should Be Available

We at the National Center would like to work with you on accessibility, affordability, and quality in higher education. We want public policy to focus on these issues more. We want to get more people into your institutions and help them do a better job getting their degrees. And we want to do this for young people and older adults all over this country, wherever they come from, whoever they are, whatever their race or religion or family background. Higher education should be available to them.

I would like to close my comments today by speaking as a person who grew up in the rural South. As a boy I picked cotton by hand, I grew peanuts, I helped harvest tobacco, and I milked cows. But when I looked around my

community I saw there were very few good jobs. And frankly, some of the big businesses didn't want many, they didn't want competition. I have seen higher education in my state and in this great nation help to pull us up, prompting us to learn where we came from, and inspiring us to find out how far we could go. I thank you today for all that you have done in this effort. And I thank this organization for taking learning seriously. But we can do better and we can go further.

I'm reminded of a story that the Irish playwright Frank O'Connor used to tell about growing up in a village in Ireland. He said that every once in a while he and his friends would get fed up with being yelled at by their mamas, and they'd just take off, get out of the house, get out of the village. They wouldn't go down a road or a tarmac, they'd just strike off across the fields and pasturēs. Pretty soon they'd come to one of those stone walls that separate the farms from the granges. Looking at that stone wall they could see it was too high to climb. When that happened, they would take off their caps and toss them over that wall, and then they had no choice but to follow them.

My friends, you may have thought that opening the doors to college, keeping the price affordable, and bringing millions more Americans into higher education are walls too high to climb. But I say to you we can do it. We have to work together, we need to help each other, we have to find the right public policies and commitments to make it happen. This is America. We have done great things in our history, we have great things ahead, and we look forward to working with you at the National Center to make them happen in the years and the decades to come. Thank you.

About the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education was established in 1998 to promote opportunity, affordability and quality in American higher education. As an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, the Center focuses on state and federal policies affecting education beyond high school. The Center receives financial support from national philanthropic organizations, and it is not affiliated with any institution of higher education or with any government agency.

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Published by The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

98-1 *Concept Paper: A National Center to Address Higher Education Policy*, by Patrick M. Callan (March 1998). Describes the rationale and purposes of The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and invites comments and suggestions from readers. Available on the world wide web.

98-2 *The Price of Admission: The Growing Importance of Higher Education*, by John Immerwahr (Spring 1998). A national survey of Americans' views on higher education, conducted and reported by Public Agenda. Available on the world wide web.

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